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ABSTRACT

Results of a case study of collaborative decision-making involving administrators, citizens, and staff show that the process, while not fully collaborative, did increase both citizen participation and community acceptance of subsequent decisions. School board members and administrators in an upper-middle-class Midwest district, faced with declining resources and enrollments, formed a planning committee that combined citizens, administrators, staff, and students. Researchers used interviews, archival data, and theories of both organizational decline and citizen and staff participation to analyze roles, attitudes, and outcomes in this collaboration. Board members and administrators played facilitating and behind-the-scenes managing roles. Citizens on the committee and on its subcommittees provided input and major recommendations. Teachers and students, however, had only a small, ill-defined role. Participants reported mostly positive attitudes toward citizen participation and gave positive assessments of the outcomes, which involved community consensus and personal growth. Central to the positive results was the planned design of the process, which set clear goals and deadlines while remaining open to all citizen input. (RW)

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THE EFFECTS OF COLLABORATIVE DECISIONMAKING
ON PARTICIPANTS IN A SCHOOL DISTRICT
FACING ORGANIZATIONAL DECLINE

by

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INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 1978 the administrators of Springdale School District^{*} realized that they had a problem. Enrollment in the small, suburban district was declining, revenues were not expanding, and inflation was hitting hard at carefully budgeted programs. Preliminary projections showed that without some change Springdale would enter deficit spending in 1978-79 and would accumulate a \$1 million deficit by 1980-81 out of a \$6-1/2 million budget.

The recognition of a need for additional revenue was not new to Springdale -- nor to any school district -- but the particular circumstances of needing additional monies not for the new programs or expanded facilities, but to maintain existing programs against inflation and in the face of precipitously declining enrollments was a new experience for the district. Springdale was facing the pressures of cut-back and organizational decline that will touch many school districts and public service agencies in the coming decade.

This paper discusses how Springdale, a Midwestern school district, historically of more than adequate means and with great pride in the quality of its educational system, set up a process to prepare for and orchestrate a transition to a time of belt-tightening and fiscal constraint. Springdale is a homogeneous upper middle class community with strongly shared community values. The study focuses specifically on the effects on participants of collaborative (citizens and school officials) management in setting priorities for the future. It is hoped that the organizational and decisionmaking model used here might serve as an illustration for other districts which will be faced with similar problems of decline.

^{*}Springdale is a fictitious name. Since Springdale is a small district, data for this report have been aggregated by groups to protect the anonymity of respondents.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The survival of public organizations, particularly school systems, depends upon their responsiveness to community needs and pressures and their flexibility in accommodating different interests. During periods of growth this flexibility can generally be accomplished by distributing resources among different competing interests. However, the situation is quite different during periods when the pool of resources either remains stable or declines. Decisions which avoid zero-sum conflict (i.e., no one is worse off) during growth periods may become zero-sum conflicts during periods of retrenchment.

Although there is a growing literature on management of organizations, including school districts, which are facing declines in resources relative to their needs (Whetten, 1979; Murray and Jick, 1979; Green, 1974; Rodekohr, 1974), Whetten's comprehensive review of the literature (1979) concluded that we need more detailed case studies of organizations facing resource declines to understand the responses and choices processes these organizations can effectively employ. In particular, since organizations facing decline appear to become rigid and conservative at a time when new priorities and ways of thinking and operating are often most needed (Whetten, 1979), attention needs to be devoted to discovering how alternative responses can be developed while simultaneously cutting back established programs.

Leading management theorists (Likert, 1961; Argyris, 1964) have advocated participative management as a strategy for organizations to set goals and priorities while minimizing the effects of zero-sum conflicts. Although the results of participative strategies are mixed (White and Ruh, 1973), many "change agents . . . stress the importance of participation under almost every conceivable circumstance" (Huse, 1975). Indeed, a vast literature on planned

change generally supports the viability of the participative approach. However, most of the planned change literature has been developed under assumptions of growth, and little is known about the use of participative strategies under conditions of decline. Moreover, since the concept of participative management has been applied mainly in business organizations, the primary participants have been employees. The term has not generally been used (nor the concept applied) to participation in public organizations by giving roles to their various internal and external constituencies.

In an organization such as a school system, the attempt to involve both citizens and employees in collaborative decisionmaking is a mixture of various strategies. It walks a conceptual line between "participative management" and "citizen involvement." We are interested in examining this approach and how it worked in a situation of decline.

STUDY OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this research is to document the use, effectiveness, and personal impact of using a participative approach to setting policy priorities for the future in a school district facing declines in enrollment and resources. How does collaborative management affect the extent of citizen and staff involvement and cooperation, and the morale and personal stresses on employees and citizens involved in this kind of decisionmaking? The actual policy outcomes and decisions reached through the process are beyond the scope of this paper.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

a. Organizational decline. In most situations of crisis organizations tend to tighten up and lose flexibility (Whetten, 1979; Smart and Vertinsky, 1978; Bozeman and Slusher, 1978). Managers tend to rely less on participative

decisionmaking (Yetton, 1975; Levine, 1979) and thus try to avoid divisive conflict. The Springdale District thus offers an opportunity to study a largely untried method for allocating increasingly scarce resources through a strategy of shared decisionmaking and extended organizational scope. Springdale's approach gives us a chance to see the effects of a determined effort to decentralize control while planning for a restricted future. Springdale's approach is related to two literatures which are different in their research tradition and their applicability to schools: participative management and citizen participation.

b. Participative management. Participative management is generally thought of as a deliberate effort to accomplish organizational goals by increasing the role played by lower level participants in decisionmaking. The classic study by Coch and French (1948) was one of the first reports of a comprehensive effort to apply participation to coping with organizational problems. Since that time Likert (1961, 1969), Argyris (1964), McGregor (1960) and numerous other writers have advocated the use of participative styles and proposed systems and techniques for implementing participative management.

Although participative management connotes a general orientation to involve lower level participants in decisionmaking processes, the term is not precise. For example, as Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1958) and Vroom and Yetton (1973) have observed, the degree of influence lower level participants are granted, the type of issues on which they are consulted and the process used to obtain their involvement can all vary widely.

The results of participative management also vary widely. For example, while in many cases participation may result in a sharing of power, greater

productivity and feelings of efficacy among participants, in other cases, participation can have the opposite effect. Mulder (1971), Nord and Durand (1975), and Pfeffer (1978) have all noted that under some conditions the use of participation may reduce the influence of lower level participants or merely serve as a strategy of cooptation. Nevertheless, there is a great deal of support in the organizational behavior literature for the view that participative management is a valuable strategy for coping with such problems as budgeting, introducing change, setting goals, achieving commitment and motivation, and resolving conflict.

c. Citizen participation. Most of the previous work on citizen participation in schools has focused on citizen involvement as represented by school board politics (Lutz and Iannaccone, 1978; Iannaccone and Lutz, 1970; Minar, 1967; Counts, 1927). More recent studies have evaluated participation in federally mandated citizen advisory committees (McLaughlin, 1975; Herriott and Gross, 1979; Spiegel in Smith, 1973). These studies have often found citizen participation in schools to be both ineffectual and not fully democratic. In fact, Herriott and Gross (1979) reported that citizen participation in NIE's Experimental School's program was often deliberately thwarted by local authorities. Educational administrators who have looked at the issues of citizen support have typically written of participation as a strategy for creating good "school-community relations" (i.e., a favorable public image with their constituencies). They have seldom been concerned with true citizen control.

Wirt and Kirst (1972) divided studies of the politics of education into those done by political scientists on political socialization and those done by sociologists and educational administrators on community power relations.

Neither group of investigators has looked at citizen participation as a potentially collegial relationship undertaken in collaboration with teachers and administrative staffs of schools. Citizen participation literature has emphasized the rivalry and opposition between professional educators and the lay community's interests. Even NIE's recently concluded study of citizen participation (Davies, 1978; 1980) emphasized the separation of citizen and professional interests in education and the manipulation of the public by professional educators.

Salisbury (1980) suggested a new approach. Relying on classical theories of citizenship, he redefined effective participation to include not only opposition to but also support of existing policies. Using this approach he examined the effect of participation on individual "participant-activists" in six school district PTAs. Salisbury's findings are important not only for understanding the extent of generalized support which is typical of most school district-community situations, but also for understanding the effects of participation on individual participants. Salisbury found that the more active people were in school affairs and the more impact they felt this activity had on them, the more likely they were to go on to participate in other civic activities. The reaching-out of the school organization to give people a role in policymaking had a positive effect on the personal development of individual citizens and, in some cases, stimulated increased participation in other civic areas. Interestingly, Salisbury omitted from his study an upper middle class district whose citizens were thought to have so many other opportunities for verbal interaction and professional development that school activities would not significantly affect their reported personal growth or civic involvement. The Springdale situation gives us an opportunity to ex-

amine how a very intense citizen involvement experience might affect even very professionally involved and verbal participants.

METHOD

The method we have used is the case study, and the report to be presented here is a preliminary analysis of interviews with 33 key participants. The in-depth interviews were conducted in the summer and fall of 1980 from citizens, students, administrators, teachers and board members who were involved in the citizens committee effort from October 1978 - March 1979. We used a snowball sampling design through which we began with a few central people whose references to others led us to further respondents. Hence the leaders of the process and those identified as dissidents are overrepresented in our sample.

Each interview lasted 1-1/2-2 hours and was relatively open-ended. The researchers posed questions from a prepared format, but respondents were told that they could depart from the format and most did. The questions encouraged respondents to talk about the structure and effects of the decision-making process, each respondent's role, his or her personal reactions to the process, and some personal background. We kept detailed handwritten notes of each respondent's running narrative, as close to word for word as possible. These individual narratives provide the raw data source for our summary presentation in this paper. We plan a further more analytical paper in which we will take up the more theoretical issues of participative management and collaborative decisionmaking. In this paper we have presented the responses of particular groups to their experiences.

OVERVIEW OF EVENTS OF THE SCHOOL DISTRICT'S
DECISION MAKING PROCESS

The decision to initiate a committee of citizens, administrative staff, and teachers to decide on the school district's future priorities originated with the school superintendent. The superintendent, public relations director, and school board prepared a detailed plan in the summer of 1978 in which they laid out a series of goals and a timeline. The Board and superintendent were anxious to reach beyond the usual small "Blue Ribbon" committee for two reasons. First, they recognized that cutbacks in programs might be necessary, and since the school district had a highly verbal and affluent constituency, with a tradition of strong support for schools, the need for these cutbacks would probably come as a surprise to many citizens. Second, the community had a very high (and increasing) proportion of citizens who have no children in schools (over 80% of the population). These are mainly elderly citizens and young childless professional people. The board and superintendent wanted to try to involve some of these people, including officials of various civic organizations and businesses on a citizens committee.

The board sent a letter in August 1978 to various city organizations -- churches, civic groups, neighborhood organizations, PTAs, educational institutions, business organizations, etc. -- asking them to nominate a representative to a "Citizens Committee to recommend educational priorities and future directions to the Board of Education." The response was mixed. Most organizations designated representatives who might have come forward anyway. Almost all representatives had children in schools. PTA and other school-related community groups were the most responsive. The next most represented organizations were the neighborhood associations although it is not clear whether these representatives were elected by their associations

or were simply considered representatives of an association because of their location of residence. Since there was a feeling in the community that the school district might be getting ready to close a school, the presence of neighborhood groups may reflect their concern. Although the citizens committee did not end up tapping the elderly or childless community to a great extent, it did get some representatives from business and non-profit institutions which had not previously been involved with the schools. Also, the effort had the effect of putting the school system on record as wanting to broaden its citizen advisory group. The nomination system was supplemented by individual board members who encouraged or asked citizens whose viewpoints they knew or from groups they wanted represented to volunteer. Any additional citizens who came forward were invited to join the committee. The resulting committee included about 88 citizens.

The school board formally appointed this group and augmented it with additional members both before and during the process. The superintendent and board conferred often about the need to maintain "balance" on the committee and on the five working subcommittees which were set up. The board and superintendent seemed to have remarkably similar views about who appropriate candidates would be. "Balance" meant keeping dominating individuals out-numbered and generally trying to keep the committees from veering in a direction favorable to only a few people or a small geographic area.

The "topical" subcommittees designated by the superintendent and board were: budget, curriculum, special programs, organizational alternatives, and future trends. Each subcommittee had a specific goal, area of concern, and detailed charge. For example, each subcommittee had to prioritize policies in its topical area and was specifically asked to show how \$200,000 could be

cut from its budget. Reports and deadlines were carefully spelled out.

The superintendent and chairperson of the school board identified and tapped an overall chairperson of the citizens committee and the five citizen chairpersons of the subcommittees. The board conferred in these decisions. The citizens who were chosen had not been brought forth by the representative process and most had been identified before the committee was formally organized. Three were parents well known to the system, three were virtual "outsiders" before they were tapped.

In addition to citizens, the superintendent appointed all principals in the district to the committee. Each principal was attached to one of the five topical subcommittees. The principals acted as "resource persons" and "assistants" to the citizen leaders of each subcommittee. A principal's secretary became the official recorder for the subcommittee to which the principal was assigned. Board members, the superintendent, assistant superintendent, business manager, public relations officer floated among the various subcommittee meetings, although each board member also had a particular subcommittee with which he or she was particularly involved. The "floaters" played a "facilitative" role when problems or questions arose, but generally they tried to maintain low profiles in the meetings.

Teachers and students were also made a part of the citizens committee but they were in smaller numbers than other groups and their selection process was more haphazard. Only three students were appointed and none stayed through the conclusion of the committee's work. Enough teachers were eventually added to the committee so that there was at least one on each subcommittee. But no subcommittee had more than two.

The five subcommittees became the main working groups. They met from

early October 1978 through March 1979, sometimes as many as two or three times a week. At the first meeting the citizens committee members were given a detailed 15-month timeline with deadlines for various reports. This timeline specified that the citizens group would make its final recommendations in March 1978; then, in the spring of 1978, the citizens committee would meet with various organizations to explain their recommendations. Over the summer, board members and staff of the district would study the recommendations of these groups. Public meetings would be held in the fall. The board would not make its final recommendations until December 1979. The timeline and planning reflected the preference of board members and the superintendent to do long range planning with ample preparation and far ahead of a crisis situation.

The focus of this study is the response of participants to the working sessions which occurred from October 1978 to March 1979. During this time the total citizens committee met three or four times for organizational meetings and information exchanges. The subcommittees prepared an interim report for the Board in December 1978. The final report was prepared and delivered to the Board of Education on March 21, 1979.

Of course, the reactions of participants to their experiences on the citizens committee are inevitably colored by the events that have come after it -- the closing of one elementary school, the elimination of 20 future staff positions (but no firing of current personnel), the board's decision to seek an 80¢ tax levy and its passage (by 68.85% of the vote with 66.67% needed), the reevaluation of the high school curriculum, etc. The fact that these events took place in an atmosphere of relative calm in the district both colors current perceptions and is a reflection of the process we have studied.

The focus of our study is not on the particular events or decisions which came out of the process, but on the process itself as a management tool for bringing about a mandate or a consensus for change.

In the sections below we summarize the responses of the various groups which were involved including board members and administrators, citizen group leaders, students, teachers, principals.

FINDINGS

We were amazed at the intensity and vividness with which all those we interviewed recalled their experiences on the citizens committee, the work of which had concluded at least 18 months before. In the following sections we discuss the roles played by the various groups, the skills and attitudes which were important to them, their perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the process, and their assessment of the outcomes of the process for the school system and the community. Finally, we will present some preliminary suggestions about how and why this process worked the way it did.

ROLES PLAYED

Board members, administrators, and principals saw themselves as resource persons, co-managers, and coordinators of the process. These groups maintained a professional distance from the citizen members in order to act as facilitators of the discussions and to encourage "openness" in the meetings. All were conscious of maintaining low profiles so as not to interject "official" ideas or policies into discussions. These groups, however, maintained a strong management role. They met separately in various configurations to discuss what was happening in the committees. They provided guidance to the sub-committee chairpersons on how to handle difficult discussions. They attended

meetings and stepped in to refocus discussion on the timeliness and tasks needed for completion. They even at times identified additional members of subcommittees who could serve to "balance" discussion.

The citizen leaders indicated a strong sense of ownership of their committees and an open-mindedness about the conclusions their groups might reach. Even a year and a half after the process every subcommittee chairman we spoke to showed us large quantities of material he or she had saved from the meetings and demonstrated very detailed recall of the events of the process. Subcommittee chairpersons adapted the organization of their groups to their personal styles, and the organizations were quite varied. Some felt that they participated actively, others took a more facilitative role.

The citizen volunteers also showed a strong sense of ownership of the process. It was common in the interviews for citizens to comment on the "difficult decisions we had to make" and to recall vividly the time and energy that their involvement took. These citizens typically characterized themselves as interested in school issues and having an "open mind" about the policies the district should adopt. Many of these citizens were professionally involved in education or social service. Many were long-time residents of the community. Almost all had children who had been, were currently, or would be in the schools. Many had participated in group processes before, although the group split half and half as to whether the experience was "like" this process. The crucial differences seem to be the size and scope of the Springdale citizens committee, its openness, and the feeling citizens had of doing a serious and important job.

Even some of those citizens who often dissented from the policies of the school system showed strong commitment to the process as it began to unfold.

One said, "At the beginning, I frankly felt that we were being assembled to 'yes' the school district to their plans and their tax increase -- and I know I'm not the only one that felt this." "But as time went on, most of us, especially myself, lost this view. As we got into the different aspects and shared information with the other committees we realized things had to change." Dissidents were more likely to think of themselves as representatives of particular areas or advocates of particular views than other citizen members. Surprisingly, all of the dissidents mentioned positive aspects about the process, even though all were cynical about its purpose to begin with. By the end either they had tempered their views or they had left the process feeling they had "said their piece."

Teachers fell in the middle. Some were extremely positive, some extremely negative about the process. Teachers were not systematically represented or integrated into the ongoing process by the district administration. At first only the official representatives of the two teacher bargaining groups were asked to join. Later, at citizen request, a few additional teachers were added. Eventually there was one teacher from each school on the whole committee. Teachers were assigned to subcommittees, and because they joined the subcommittee after the first several meetings had taken place, they often felt behind. All but one of the teachers we spoke to were selected by their principals. They considered the assignment as "one of those things you do as part of your job," although most were very committed to quality education in the schools. Teachers did not help plan the citizen committee process, although they were aware of it through informal contacts and staff newsletters. (Later the staffs of each school were given the opportunity to respond to the recommendations that the citizens committee had made). In spite of this most teachers (and most members of other groups we spoke to) felt that teachers

were adequately represented on the committee. Only one teacher felt that more teachers should have been appointed in certain areas.

Teachers do not seem to have had much guidance about the role they should play. Consequently, each was left to develop a workable role for a given subcommittee. In several cases participants noted that teachers felt "unprotected," and "not well prepared" to deal with the demands of working with the citizens committee. The teachers we interviewed split half and half about the primary purpose of their role. Half felt they were resource people and representatives of staff viewpoints. Half felt that their roles changed from that of a resource person to a fully participating member of the group. The latter role was not entirely easy. One teacher told us, "I was not comfortable with it [the change] at first. It was challenging some of my own views of my job." Later this teacher said, "It was very important to the district. You felt like they needed you, and they covered so many things at each meeting, if you missed too many, you'd be hopelessly lost."

Most teachers felt they were on the committee to represent a viewpoint specific to their jobs -- whether it was their subject matter, school, teacher group, or age-level of students. Several teachers alluded to the role of the citizens committee to "educate" citizens about the schools; and the function of the committee in bringing about good public relations and support. Generally the teachers thought that the school board and the superintendent had made an intelligent decision to involve a wide spectrum of the community in this type of decisionmaking, but they were somewhat unsure of what their role in the decisionmaking should be.

Teachers who had been in the system longest thought of citizens on the committee as dedicated but not fully informed lay people with some sort of

an ax to grind. One said, "the people there --the outsiders -- didn't see how [a particular program] worked. I don't think they ever did understand my point of view, though we spend many hours trying to communicate." Another said, "Sure, they were flexible; but each person came with a particular quirk or bias and was flexible on other issues but not that one." At their mildest, teachers were just interested in what citizens had to say. This inability to identify fully with citizens and the absence of a role provided for teachers outside the committee structure may account for the greater personal stress reported by this group.

Of all groups, students felt the most cut off from the process. Only three high school students joined the subcommittees and none of these remained on the committee through its conclusions. Most other groups we spoke to felt that this isolation and underrepresentation was probably unavoidable due to the demands on students' time. And many participants were uncertain about the appropriateness or the substantive contribution that students could make. But the students we spoke to indicated that no efforts were made to help them identify meaningful roles and they felt hostility from some members as well as personal vulnerability when they gave their opinions in front of teachers and school administrators. These issues were not successfully planned for or addressed by the administration, board, or citizens group. Still, students were not hostile to the process. They had good feelings about the leaders of their subcommittees, and all indicated that they would be willing to participate in a process like this again.

SKILLS AND ATTITUDES OF PARTICIPANTS

All of the participants we interviewed were highly articulate, verbal, active, professionally involved people. They were busy with demanding jobs,

family, civic affairs, and many interests. Many of these people had been involved with schools or educational issues before. All mentioned the high quality of the Springdale educational system and their faith in the quality of the administration and staff. There was widespread support for the school board.

The superintendent was only slightly more controversial. Almost everyone saw him as a "fine educator" and an "astute politician." Many were frankly admiring of his intelligence, careful planning, and knowledge of the district. But these very capabilities sometimes seemed to participants to indicate an over-control of the situation. Certain people felt that though the citizens committee process was "open," it was so carefully orchestrated that it could only come out as the superintendent intended and anticipated.

One leader of the process characterized it as "to some extent eyewash," then clarified, "It's simply the nature of the process. You don't start with a pure blank board. The school board puts problems out there and guides you toward a solution. In the process some things get developed that weren't already there. . . . But the value of the process is in bringing community leadership into institutional knowledge. In the process they help to shape those solutions. But the major elements of the solutions are known before you start." "There was a particular problem and 'yes' he knew what it was. Then the second problem he saw was the problem of making other people see the problem he saw."

Other participants described these qualities in the superintendent more positively. A characteristic aphorism came up in three separate interviews which illustrates his highly rationalistic approach. "[The superintendent] is a strong believer in the participative process and is willing to devote the time to engage in it. [He] had the idea: we'd provide the facts; let the

facts speak for themselves, and people would follow with a good decision."

A few participants had been skeptical about the citizens committee because they felt it had been set up to gain approval of a tax levy. These people had the most complex personal responses to the process as it unfolded. But interestingly none of these participants identified skills which helped them to cope.

The key skills mentioned by board members and administrators were the ability to develop restraint, to deflect questions, to listen, and to avoid presenting your own ideas. The board members who were most successful at this mentioned their genuine curiosity about the conclusions people might reach and their fascination at seeing others becoming so deeply involved. Board members explicitly accepted the ambiguity that the process involved. They had discussed among themselves and accepted that it might open them to criticisms. Yet all members seemed to support the process as a means of providing accessibility of the school system to the community's values. In many ways, this transference of power to the citizens seemed to free up and reduce the tension for board members of making difficult or unpopular decisions.

The superintendent, by his own account, believed strongly in "shared leadership" and in giving people "the leeway and real responsibility to carry it out." He told us, "The approach was designed to make sure people will own the decisions. It's their community, their schools. The temptation is to be the biggest/cleverest/smarest in any situation. The trouble with that approach is that people will obey only 'til you leave. In this situation I could resign tomorrow and the process would continue." This philosophy of openness and trust in his constituents was borne out by many statements about the superintendent from other participants.

Principals mentioned that it was important in the subcommittees to let someone else have the spotlight. They found themselves trying to avoid dominating the chairpeople. Second, they had to avoid becoming defensive. As one principal put it, "If you want others to open up, you cannot be constantly defending yourself." The one regret some principals had was in not preparing their staffs better for dealing with the citizens committee.

Subcommittee leaders felt they had organizational ability, sensitivity to people's feelings, patience, and the ability to give individual members confidence in their ideas. All of the chairpeople mentioned the importance of keeping the committees on task by reminding them of deadlines, but at the same time allowing dissenting or even disruptive opinions ample time to be voiced.

Citizen members typically brought their interests in the schools, but they also mentioned their "open-mindedness" and interest in process as helpful to them in the meetings. It was unusual for a citizen to mention professional knowledge or technical expertise as an advantage in the committees. However, many citizens had had training in organizational change and group dynamics. Some described themselves as good at "analyzing" or "summarizing" or "compromising" or other facilitative skills.

Those teachers who were most comfortable in the process also described themselves as having open minds and a willingness to "put things in perspective."

Thus, we found that each of the layers of management of the citizens committee consciously deferred power to the unaffiliated citizen group. And the citizens saw themselves as unencumbered decisionmakers with open minds and an important duty to fulfill.

PERSONAL OUTCOMES

Positive. Six people mentioned very strong feelings of personal and professional growth which they felt occurred as a result of this process. Almost all those we interviewed said they were highly committed to the process as it was unfolding. Only one, a principal, said he was "lukewarm" but later came to see that it was of tremendous value. Two citizen committee members ran for and were elected to the school board. From what we could tell their involvement in the citizens committee was a direct factor in their decision to run and did not predate it. Several board members cited growth of their personal leadership skills and confidence. At least two chairpersons emerged with new confidence and acknowledged respect from other committee members and the community. Principals cited changes in their "managerial styles." Many people mentioned that they increased their respect for all the various groups involved. But, particularly, citizens tended to renew respect for board members, the superintendent and administration. The staff mentioned its respect for the commitment and depth of involvement of citizens. One indication of the intensity of this growth was how difficult it was for us to get people to stop talking about their experiences. In some cases interviews had to be extended or continued beyond a two hour session, because participants had more to say.

Other personal outcomes such as increased information about programs of the district or exposure to parents and the community was considered less intense. Reports of increased "communications," "rapport with the community" and "trust" were seen as general community benefits.

Negative. The negative outcome cited most often was the time the process took. Some participants spent as much as 1-1/2 days per week preparing for

and attending the meetings. Some of the more intensely involved participants mentioned hours of sleeplessness or agitation after each meeting. This was attributed to the stress of meetings where various clashing views were presented. A few teachers mentioned pressures from their jobs.

Not all participants were positive about the process. One referred to the citizens committee as a "travesty," another said it was, "Horrible, just horrible. I had the helpless feeling of not being able to help . . . anyone." Others felt it was not thorough enough or "too broad in scope to do a professional job," or that teachers were not adequately protected. But these were exceptional statements. Only one person of those we interviewed would never participate in a committee like this again and one was unsure. Although the process created some stress for most people the stress seemed to be balanced by the sense of satisfaction participants got from being involved in something they considered important. However, the tension and stress of the meetings were very real, and several participants mentioned that our interview brought back uncomfortable feelings that they had tried to forget.

COMMUNITY OUTCOMES

Almost all community outcomes mentioned were positive -- the creation of a strong consensus for closing a school; a broader, stronger, and more specific commitment of the community to the schools; development of a 15-20 person core group of active citizen supporters for the district, etc.

The negative outcomes mentioned were the drains on district resources in staff time, burdens on normal work loads, and support services. However, these costs were seen as unavoidable. One leader stated, "The time factor was not a negative, either you do it this way and provide enough time, or you don't." Some principals wonder whether the process has given the community

too much influence and access to the system. One principal suggested that the community might now want to elect a new high school principal, "How do you tell them to back off?" he asked.

SUMMARY

It appears that the outcomes of the process on participants and on the school system were predominantly positive. However, we cannot discount the tension and the stress for certain participants, and the apparent loss to the school system of dissident voices. Some dissidents have become inactive in the face of the strong consensus which has emerged. One remarked, "I don't participate anymore. I feel I spent so much time and what happened as a result of it? Nothing much."

It is interesting that positive growth in leadership and self-confidence occurred in a group which was already highly professionally and technically skilled. Salisbury, 1980, was skeptical that such upper middle class professionally involved citizens would experience growth through normal involvement in an educational organization. Our study shows that even very competent and active citizens can be drawn into challenging exercises of their personal skills through an intense experience like the Springdale citizens committee. And, like the groups studied by Salisbury, this growth of citizenship, self-confidence, and skill is associated with a strong democratic consensus and mandate in support of the school district.

DISCUSSION: WHAT MADE IT WORK?

DESIGN ASPECTS

Most of the participants we interviewed considered this citizens committee to be different from other committees they had served on or knew about.

Participants mentioned several design factors which they thought separated this committee from others and accounted for the greater degree of commitment they felt to it.

1. The process was carefully planned with deadlines and expectations set at the beginning. The report and interim reports were set out as clearly defined tasks. All of these factors gave participants a sense of direction and security that the process was being well-directed.

2. Each subcommittee was free to organize itself as it saw fit. Participants were urged to speculate about a "dream list" of what they would like to happen within each substantive area. The district went out of its way to supply resources (telephones, secretarial help, materials, expertise) to aid the committees, but each committee decided for itself how to make use of these resources. What seems to have happened is that the board and the superintendent worked very hard to manage things so that they facilitated the process while staying as clear of the substance as possible. These factors gave participants a sense of the "openness" of the process and of their personal part in directing and shaping the outcomes.

3. Subcommittee reports were not required to be consistent. The reports of the five subcommittees were allowed to stand even when they conflicted with each other. As long as they contained clear priority statements, they could even contain internal inconsistencies. This strategy gave citizens further confidence that the board and administrators had no preordained conclusions that all subcommittees were "supposed" to reach. It also gave the board sufficient maneuvering room when the final decisions were made to choose among alternative and conflicting recommendations. As a management tool, flexibility and the lack of insistence on a clear consensus from all the subcommittees made the administrators and board seem realistic in the eyes

of citizens. It raised their stature as managers of the process because they had delegated what was obviously a "doable" task and had not passed off the hard final decisions to others.

4. Deadlines served a special function. They provided important guidance by forcing decisions to be made -- committees could not go on endlessly listening to opinions without making some decisions about their priorities. Deadlines also provided benchmarks from which participants could measure their progress. Also, deadlines gave participant the reassurance that the process would come to an end. Several people mentioned to us that they were glad it had not lasted any longer, because they were beginning to wear thin. The tangible products produced to meet the various deadlines gave participants physical results from which they could get satisfaction.

5. The administration and school board indicated their support of the citizens committee in various ways. As one principal put it, "The committees were complimented and thanked repeatedly and heavily. Some meetings seemed called just to do this." In addition, little amenities such as coffee, refreshments, and so forth, were provided. Perhaps even more important were things that were done which showed that the school system was really taking things seriously. Principals, board members, and members of the administrative staff regularly attended the meetings. Moreover board members and administrators appeared committed to the process and genuinely open to the ideas being discussed.

6. Many meetings were held to provide management and cross-communication among the managerial layers which were overseeing the citizens committee. The management groups -- administrators, board members, chairpeople, principals met in numerous small group sessions to discuss the progress of the committees.

Weekly meetings of a steering committee composed of the general chairperson of the citizens committee, the chairpersons of the subcommittees, the

superintendent, principals, and the board chairperson provided a setting where the management groups could respond to the substance of the reports prior to their becoming finalized.

Normal administrative meetings devoted time to keeping administrators informed about what was taking place. Principals met individually with their chairperson. The superintendent and board chairman often conferred. Ad hoc groups seem to have been constantly comparing notes. Regular school board meetings were also held.

This structured communication had two important effects. First, the substantive discussions taking place in the subcommittees and the direction each committee was taking did not come as a surprise to any of the management groups when the committees got ready to make their reports. Second, and perhaps more important for the ultimate result, by meeting separately and discussing its most appropriate role, each management group felt that it was the key group in making the citizens committee run smoothly. While each management layer had ceded power for decisionmaking to the lowest level, the citizens, each felt that its own role was crucial in making the citizens committee a success. Thus, the feelings of leadership and responsibility were truly shared throughout the organization.

SUMMARY-DESIGN

In summary, a number of key points about the design emerged. These included timing, openness, flexibility the development of a time table and insistence on deadlines, administrative commitment, and internal communication and shared responsibility. In addition, the board and superintendent were careful not to cede more power to the citizens committee than it was legally entitled to give. Under state law the board of education had to remain the

official voice of the district, and citizens were reminded that their role was advisory and the board was not bound by their reports.

PROCESS ASPECTS

Openness and self-direction in the subcommittees seems to have brought about intense commitment to the process by almost all participants. Although over half of those we interviewed said they had participated in groups like this before, almost everyone mentioned that they felt their commitment had been greater this time, because they felt that their ideas were really being taken seriously. Even the stress and frustration that many people reported feeling in the meetings and among their peers in the community did not dampen their enthusiasm for the sense of involvement and "importance" of the committee's work.

Attrition in the citizens committee from its original size of 80-100 to an active group of perhaps 40-50 was seen by some participants as not particularly bad. What appeared to have happened was that during the first four to six meetings of each subcommittee, there was a wide airing of opinions and agendas. People got a chance to express their concerns. In some committees a whole meeting was devoted to one individual making a report about his particular concerns and recommendations, and then tending to drop out of the group.

Getting these agendas out appeared to diffuse a lot of potential hostility. In one or two cases even those who dropped out later supported the recommendations made by the board. As one principal put it, "Ideas were never black-balled, but nothing ever came of doubtful ones." Another principal observed that once these agendas were out, people began to see their commonalities rather than their differences.

It seems to us that the opportunity for people to drop out contributed to the maturing of the working groups. The initial open-endedness of the meetings contributed importantly to the success of the process -- with success not necessarily being defined as the most creative alternative being adopted, but as the development of a group which would be able to set priorities and deal with difficult issues when the time came. Part of the maturing of the groups appears to be due to attrition, part due to people finding common interests, and part due to the reduction of emotional intensity once people had a chance to express their views.

In other words, the process served to wear down certain groups of people. Core groups realized that something had to be done, opponents began to realize that they did not have the information to fight particular actions, so they went away or went along. In short, the dissemination of information combined with the draining of psychological energy required by the process contributed to a climate where tough decisions could be made.

The expenditure of time and energy also seemed to make those who stayed on ready to accept -- even to pressure for -- decisive actions. As one citizen who had had no involvement with the school system before the citizens committee observed, "I came to the conclusion that we had no choice but to close one elementary school." In this statement the respondent shows that she has fully accepted ownership of a difficult and decisive action and that she has come to this conclusion of her own volition.

Role of teachers and students. We have already noted that the faculty who appeared before the subcommittees sometimes made poor impressions. A failure of the process was its inattention to the stress that faculty members would feel in this kind of a situation and the lack of guidance from the

school administration in providing a meaningful and accepted role for teachers. There was a clear consensus among principals and administrators and among some board members that teachers and students had not really been involved very heavily in any type of substantive input. For the most part, the absence of student input was seen as inevitable. The absence of faculty input was not seen as a major problem, but the reasons for it were less clear. Although administrators and principals acknowledged that it had created some unfortunate stress among this group, one principal said, "The faculty was just on there to give the administration the chance to say the faculty was involved. They were not tapped adequately. But this was not all bad. . . . And if you wound up having the administrators or faculty coming up with different recommendations from the rest of the community, this could create a sticky situation." Faculty, on the other hand, reported that their peers showed only modest interest in the committee's proceedings and some schools had difficulty getting volunteers to participate. In short, the approach was seen as designed primarily to get citizen participation, the minor role played by other groups was not seen as a major concern.

Influence of principals. The principals, at least by their own reports, varied greatly in the roles they played in the subcommittees. Two of them acted very much like behind-the-scenes cochairmen. They spent long hours planning and debriefing the meetings with the chairpersons. Although in the meeting they played relatively unobtrusive roles, they did play an important role in agenda setting. They also played a process role in encouraging groups to make decisions and to keep on target. They also played a role in helping the chairpeople deal with individuals who were dominating the group.

Board members and administrators. The low profiles maintained by board

members and administrators on substantive issues belied their strong management of the process behind the scenes. They helped to carefully orchestrate the settings in which decisions took place. All of this activity was designed to "let the citizens make their own recommendations." A board member said, "The object was for them to come to a conclusion, rather than for the board to present alternatives."

Conclusion

The citizens committee was an enormous success from many viewpoints. It brought about a high degree of consensus and commitment in the community to the goals of the school system. Participation created a strong sense of commitment and involvement and sometimes of personal growth. The process gave the school system a firm foundation for making difficult administrative decisions and a clear direction for its future. Almost unanimously participants thought the process was "necessary", "important" and "well worth the effort."

Still, the process did not bring about fully collaborative decisionmaking among all the various groups involved. The separate role identifications of teacher, student, principal, administrator, and citizen were not brought together in a way that allowed these groups jointly to develop policy. Yet, the Springdale experience also seems to have gone far beyond the usual explanation of animosity and manipulation between professional educators and the lay community which has characterized most studies of citizen participation.

In Springdale, participants in the citizens committee effort came very close to the ideal of a participative management process. Yet, the traditional and mythic associations of these words did not allow most participants to

view what they were doing in this way. This may be one reason why when we asked participants whether they felt they had been "helping to manage" the school system many rejected the question as "poorly worded" or inappropriate. Almost none thought that they had done more than "provide input" or recommendations to those who were the decisionmakers. In the minds of citizens and staff of the school district the citizens committee was an effective way of building commitment and gaining citizen advice, but it fell short -- probably by deliberate design -- of giving citizens an organizational role alongside other school system groups and managers in the ongoing management of the district. Perhaps this is as much as can be expected given the legal and traditional structure of school districts. We will explore the theoretical implications of our results for participative management, citizen participation, and collaboration in another paper.

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